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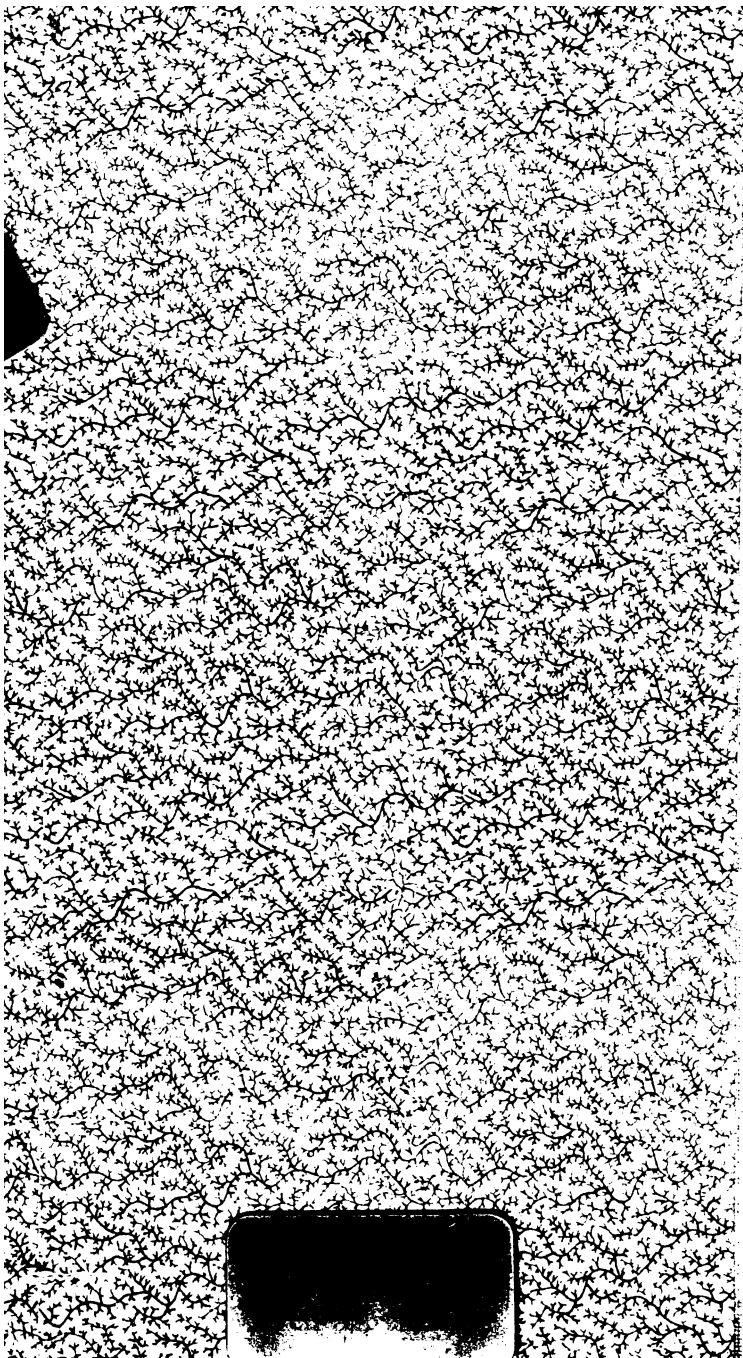
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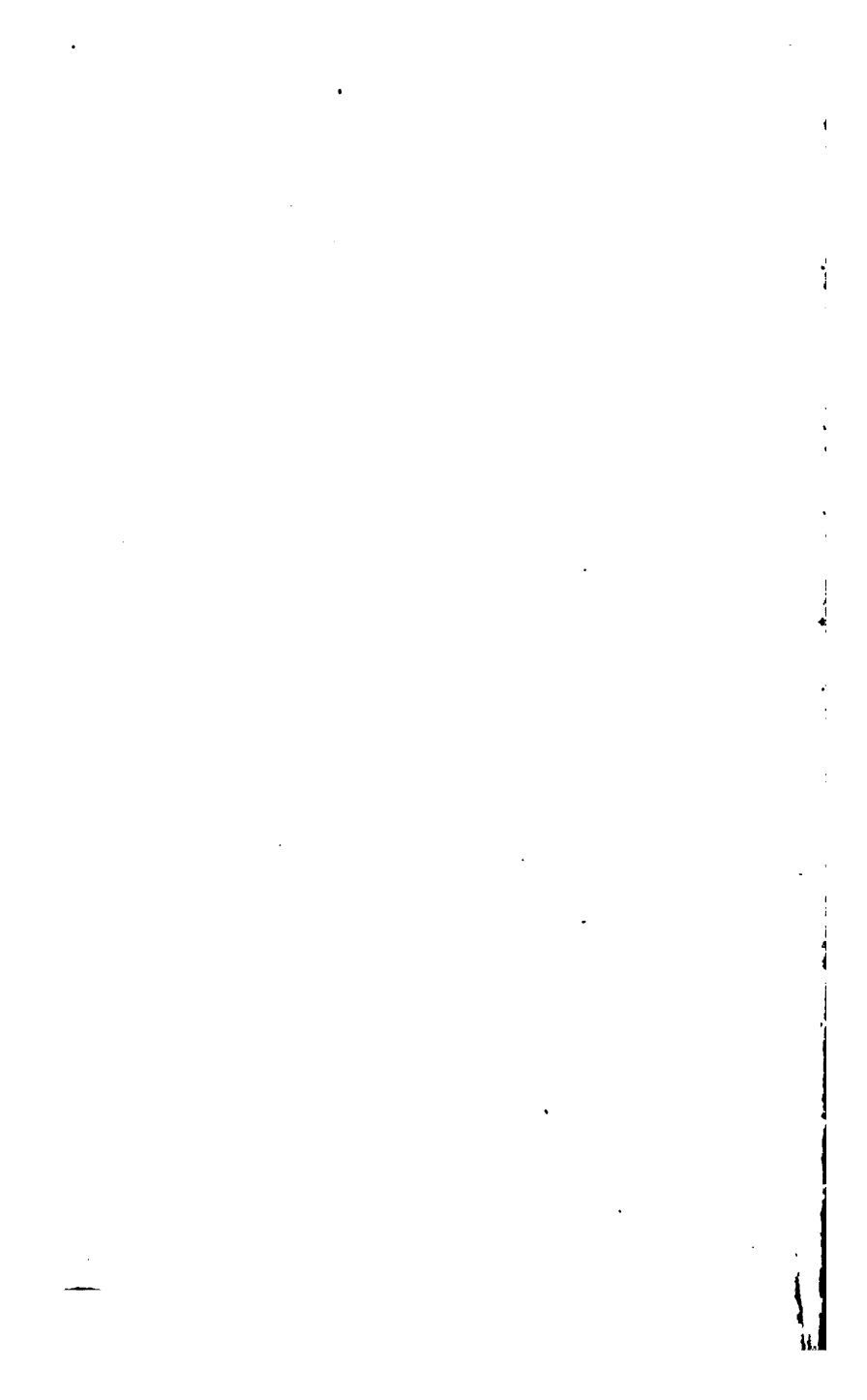
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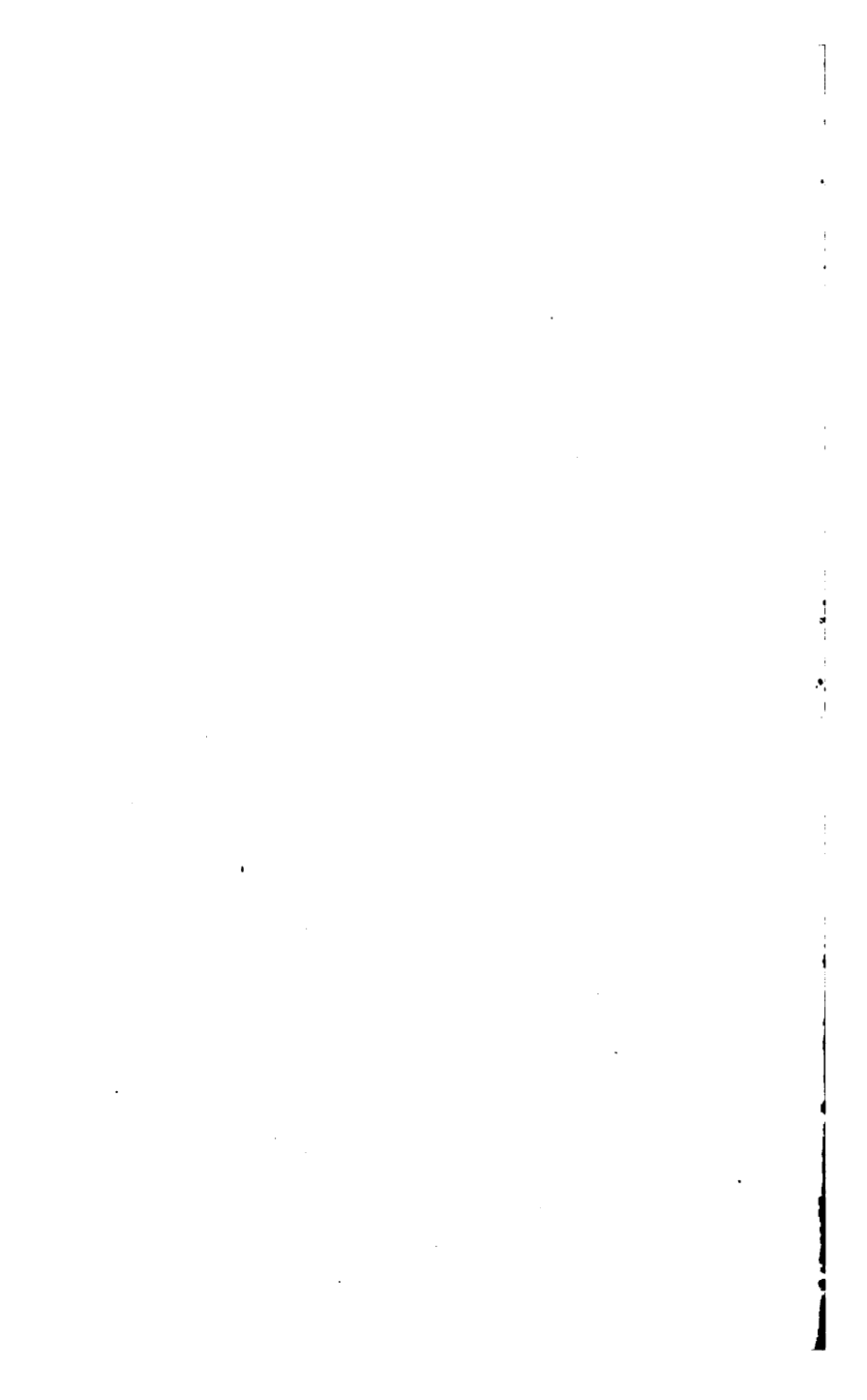
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(Three)
NAL





THREE WORDS
TO
NOVEL READERS;

OR

**A SHORT EXAMINATION INTO THE EFFECT OF WORKS
OF FICTION ON THE MIND.**

“ ————— Sing

By what unseen and unsuspected arts
The serpent error twines round human hearts ;
Tell where she lurks, beneath what flowery shades,
That not a glimpse of genuine light pervades ;
The poisonous, black, insinuating worm,
Successfully conceals her lost form.”

COWPER.

“ Read not to contradict and dispute ; nor to believe and take for
granted ; nor to find fault, and discourse ; but to weigh and consider.”

LORD BACON.

BY A LAYMAN.

NEW YORK:

SWORD, STANFORD, & CO. ; COLLINS, KEESE, & CO.

W. E. DEAN, PRINTER.

MDCCLXXXVII.



ENTERED,

According to the Act of Congress, in the year 1837, by

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In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Southern District of

NEW YORK.

PREFACE.

IN presenting the following pages to the public, the author is fully aware that he is treading on delicate ground. It can scarcely be that so many have habituated themselves to Novel Reading, without having examined the propriety of so doing, or without some fixed reason or excuse for it in their own minds. But still it is believed, that not a few are in the habit of perusing such works, without having once reflected on the effects that such read-

ing may produce on their happiness, welfare, or prosperity. To such, this little Book is addressed.

It would be presumption for any one who attempts to oppose a custom so far spread and so deeply rooted as this is, not to look for censure and opposition; such he must expect, should his work be noticed at all; but the importance of the subject, both in a political and religious point of view, appears to call for some effort, especially at the present time, however little effect that may produce.

Those who are in the habit of looking carefully at what is going on around them, cannot but have observed with fear and regret, the prevalence and increase of crime in this country. Vice walks abroad at noonday, and society is disturbed by outrages of the most atro-

cious character. In the South, murders are fearlessly perpetrated, and that but too often with the utmost levity and impunity; and in the North, the daily papers bear witness to continued acts of arson and robbery. The charities of private life are no less perverted, and whole communities are at enmity with each other; while dissipation, vice, and infidelity, are not only openly paraded, but too often warmly advocated.

In attempting to trace the causes of this, the impression is powerfully forced on the mind, that all of it arises from a growing negligence of religion, and of piety of life; and this not only among the majority, but even among those holding the highest stations in society, and who are the most enlightened by education.

For this, again, some cause must be sought ; and among many very obvious ones, the writer is deeply impressed with the consideration that the common and most prevalent habit of Novel reading has great power and effect.

It has been truly remarked, that "the character of a nation is determined by its reading." It appears that Novels are those works which are chiefly read by the people of these States, and in the writer's opinion, such have the effect of deadening religious impressions, and preventing holiness of life. How far this is true must be judged of by others, but if it be correct, the conclusion is obvious.

If he be right, the importance of giving the subject a calm and unprejudiced investigation must immediately appear to every person. In an active

and intelligent country like this, there is no one whose example and conduct has not more or less weight, and as all read—if the books generally used be injurious, what consequences may not be expected to arise?

In preparing the following sheets, many works have been consulted and their words occasionally transferred to these pages without acknowledgment. Those who are acquainted with the originals will immediately recognise them, and to those who are not, the author begs to state, that by transferring and adopting them he has made himself responsible for their opinions. He disclaims all literary merit, his only object having been to place the subject in the strong light which it appears to deserve, and yet, at the same time, to confine it within moderate bounds.

Should any of the doctrinal opinions be disputed, he has only to remark that they are such as he believes the Bible inculcates, as far as he can understand it by the light which is given to him, and such as are advocated by men of allowed judgment and piety, whose works have been consulted. Should they be erroneous, no one will rejoice more than the author in seeing the mistakes proved and corrected.

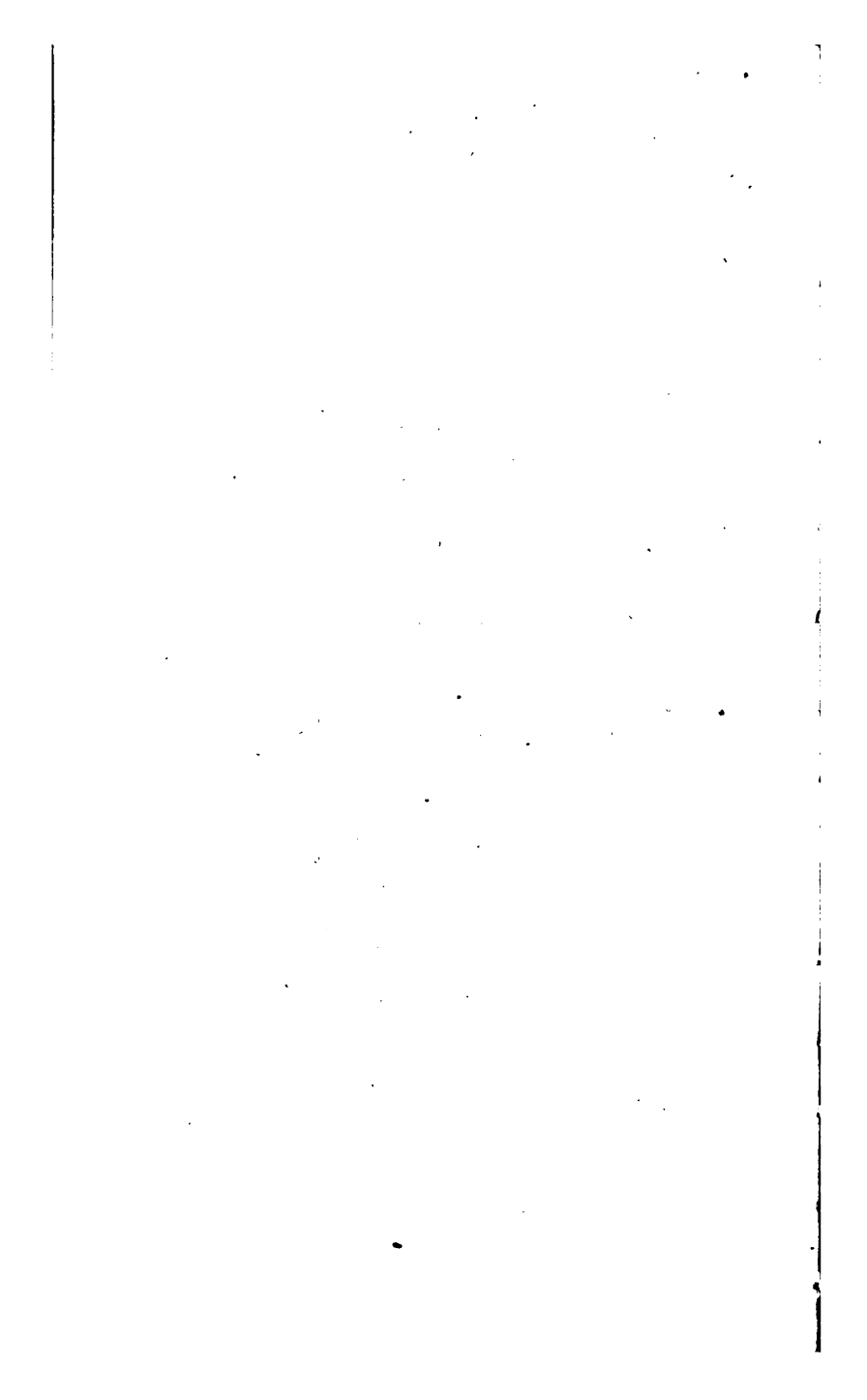
Should these pages fail in producing any obvious effect, or in convincing any one, yet the author hopes that some writer more able than he is, may be induced to turn his attention to the subject ; and should he be censured for thus stepping forward as he has done, his plea must be the great importance of his object, and he cannot offer any better excuse than that contained in the consideration of the momentous words

of the Apostle,—“To him that knoweth,” (or thinketh that he knoweth,) “to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is SIN.”

That these pages, however, may not pass away without some fruit, and that some one soul, at least, may by this means be edified, and called to the consideration of its eternal welfare, is the Author's fervent prayer to HIM, who alone teacheth and directeth all hearts.

P. P.

New York, February, 1837.



THREE WORDS, &c.

It is a remarkable and startling fact, that of the eight thousand books now on the Trade list of this country, more than ONE HALF of them are Novels, or else works of injurious tendency;¹ and still further, the number of editions and copies of *these* issued from the press, very much surpasses those of works on other subjects. Of the novels of one writer alone it is stated that upwards of three million copies have been disposed of in the United States. And as the remaining half of the eight thousand includes all the circle of the sciences,—all practical and religious publications, (ex-

(1) This statement is made on the authority of a paper published by the American Tract Society, December 1836.

cept those issued by societies,) it is evident that the reading of works of fiction infinitely surpasses the study of any *one* branch of learning. For extending the circulation of the former, numerous facilities exist; while very few organizations are found to promote any other sort of reading; so that a given number of volumes on the one subject must be perused by a far greater number of persons than the same number of volumes on the other topics. It is a well-known fact that all, or very nearly all, the circulating libraries in this city consist of novels; and we speak within bounds when we assert, that in the larger and more established libraries, a novel is circulated frequently more than twelve, and seldom less than three times oftener than any other book. All this proves, that the reading of works of fiction, is the great reading of this city; and experience shows, that among a very large number of persons this is the universal and sole literary subject ever presented to their minds.

It is trite and self-evident, but nevertheless true, that there are only two distinct

modes by which the human mind can be formed and enlarged,—by reading, and by conversation ; and by one or both of these thoughts are produced, and from thoughts proceed actions. It is by these actions we distinguish those who are good from those who are bad, the virtuous from the vicious, and on them depend the happiness and misery, not only of individuals both now and hereafter, but of the country and of mankind universally. Anciently as among the earliest nations, and still later as among the Athenians, tradition and conversation were the only, or almost sole means of improvement ; but in the present day, by far the greatest part of our ideas, or of our information, of our rules of conduct, or of our knowledge of a future world, is drawn from books, and corrected and refined by what passes before us in the ordinary course of life. He who reads acquires the thoughts and experience of all who have gone before him ; he who does not, has only the narrow and erroneous field of his own knowledge from which to judge, or on which to act. This being the case, it is of importance, how great I need not try to

express, that the books which any one reads should be such as may tend to improve his mind, and render him more able to fulfil his duties. If the works be good, if they promote useful thoughts and intelligence, they fit that person for acting in a more becoming and useful manner ; but if they be the contrary, if instead of doing this, they inculcate bad principles, or leave the mind bare of ideas and listless, it must be evident that they are not only useless, but even injurious.

It is one of the phenomena connected with the human mind, that it never stands still ; if it be not actually progressing, it is positively and quickly going back ; there is for it no resting place, but it must always be in motion one way or another. If therefore, the objects on which the mind is employed, be not such as strengthen and improve it, it is almost certain that they injure and hurt it. He who is not an infidel must know, (however little he may act on it,) that to God he is accountable for the improvement of all his talents, and for the use he makes of the intellects with which he is endowed. It is not sufficient that they

are not perverted, but they must be positively improved ; it was not because the wicked servant (mentioned by St. Luke) had *squandered* his pound that he was punished, but because he had hid it in a napkin and neglected to increase it.¹ As reading is the means by which in the present day we are given power to improve our talents, it is a question of the most vital importance to all who care for their future welfare, whether the books they peruse are such as help them in their course, or whether they retard or even entirely cast them down. As we have seen above, that the great mass of books read are novels, it becomes an important question what is the tendency of such on the mind, and whether it is or is not such as we would consider right, when calmly and considerately judged by the rule of the Scriptures. It must be of importance to all to consider, whether by the reading of works of fiction they become more useful and charitable, more assimilated to the character of their Saviour while they live, or more fit and pre-

(1) Luke, xix. 13—24.

pared to die ; and allowing for a moment that the reading of such works be quite harmless, so as to leave the mind exactly where they found it, yet it is to be considered whether the *non-improvement alone* be in itself not a sin. Let it not be forgotten that there are sins of *omission*, as well as sins of *commission*. In the following pages it is proposed shortly to examine this subject ; for it will be no excuse before the judgment seat of God, to plead that you never thought of the impropriety of an action ; or that even those whom you were accustomed to respect set you the example. "That servant, which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes : but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required ; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."¹ He who sins *against* knowledge, though his sins were only sins of omission, shall be beaten with

(1) Luke, xii. 47, 48.

many stripes. But he who sins *without* knowledge, though his sins were sins of commission, shall be beaten with few stripes. *Mere negligence* against the light of conscience, shall be severely punished, while if committed *without knowledge* an event in itself comparatively heinous, shall be mildly dealt with. This merciful discrimination, however, is full of terror; for whatever may be the case respecting past forsaken and repented sins of ignorance, no man is entitled to take comfort to himself from this passage respecting his present or future course of life, the very thought of doing so proves that the person entertaining that thought has sufficient knowledge to place him beyond its favourable operation.

In our progress through life, it is of great importance that we frequently reflect on the end for which we are living,—that we carefully look at the purpose for which God has created us, and the duties which we are required to fulfil. Should we neglect this, we are very apt to become lukewarm and careless, and by degrees to cease from our daily

duties, and our dependence on Him who supports us. As an ambassador amidst the distractions and gaities of a court, must always bear in mind the purpose for which he resides there, so ought we always to remember the situation in which we are in this world placed. As forgetful of this he would in all probability become the mere man of pleasure, or seeker after his own prosperity, so are we most apt to forget that we are but pilgrims here below, who have no abiding place, and should have no will but that of our Father who is in Heaven; and as his duties are earnestly to labour for the interest of the kingdom from which he is sent, to protect such subjects of his prince as may require his assistance, and to be prepared and willing to return the moment his master may require him, so it is the Christian's duty, as owning the sovereignty of the King of Kings, to strive earnestly for the welfare of his kingdom upon earth, to cherish his fellow-creatures here,¹ and so to live, that he be willing and prepared to depart from this

(1) Matt. v. 44, Romans, xii. 14—20.

world whenever he may be called. But as the ambassador has individual and personal duties,—to obtain all the information for his guidance that he can, to provide for himself such things as may keep up the dignity of his country, and to guard against all deception, so have we duties which we owe more particularly to ourselves,—to study the word of God for our direction, to seek a nearer and more spiritual communion with him, to examine and judge ourselves, and so to let our “light shine before men, that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in Heaven.” The great end for which we are sent into this world is, that we may work out our salvation. Whatever tends towards this object is right, but if we suffer ourselves to be led away from it, we are not only neglecting our most positive duty, but defeating the very intention of our existence. The moving power at the end of the lever of our every thought and action ought to be the love of God, as it is written, “Whatsoever ye do, do ALL to the glory of God.”¹

(1) 1 Cor: x. 31.

What would be thought of a person who was nominally studying for the ministry, if his whole time was passed in shooting or card playing? why, that he never would be fit for his calling, that he never could accomplish the end which he had in view. He might make an excellent sportsman or gamester, but he never could be a clergyman; and in the same manner, if we neglect the interests of the world to come, for the pleasures of the present moment, we may become accomplished or learned, but are equally unlikely to gain the point which we expect, or to reach Heaven. The end of our living is, that we may increase in faith and holiness, become more pure in mind, and be more assimilated to the character of Christ. Be not deceived, Heaven is not the place for the impure, but for the holy. We are here that we may become changed, that our naturally depraved and wicked dispositions may, through the influence of the Holy Ghost, become assimilated to the character of our Saviour, that our sins may be overcome, and our minds transformed by the renewing of the Spirit, for "except a man be born again, he cannot see," that is, he

cannot enjoy, "the kingdom of God,"¹ so great, so wonderful is the change that must take place in us before we can reach that destination. Christ taught that this life is a state of trial to prepare us for a better, and that God would finally take account of the secrets of men's hearts, as well as judge them for their words and actions. To regulate therefore the thoughts and desires is necessary, in order to fit mankind for appearing before their judge, and to qualify them for entering those abodes into which we are told there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth. It is therefore of vital interest to us to search out and follow whatever may help us in this determination, and on the contrary to avoid whatever may retard us, however pleasant that thing may be for the present.

It has been well remarked that were an unrenewed person,—the man of the world, of pleasure, of riches, or of ambition, taken to Heaven, it would be no Heaven to him ; his soul could find no happiness in praising God,

(1) John, iii. 3.

in walking in holiness, and in sinning not for evermore; like the Israelites of old, he would be lusting after the flesh pots of Egypt, though accompanied with bondage and cruel taskmasters, and unceasing and restless slavery. The great end and aim of the believer's life is to promote the glory of Jesus Christ. St. Paul declares to the Philippians, that the one object of all his labours and sufferings was, that Christ might be magnified in his body, whether it be by life or death, and then he adds, "for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."¹ Those who love their Lord in sincerity cannot but be anxious to glorify him with their bodies, their souls, and their talents. All their desire will be to him, and the glory of his name. They will seek to promote the interest of their Redeemer's kingdom; they will esteem every enjoyment joyless, which is not sweetened by his love; and every effort useless, which is not connected with his glory.

We are placed here that we may work out

(1) Philippians, i. 21.

our salvation. We are born in sin, the children of wrath, and our souls are by nature at enmity with God. In him we can see no goodness, nor do we desire to be with him, unless we be born again. But an eternity is to be passed in his presence, an eternity spent in praising his holy name. That we may be in a fit state for this we require preparation. If by chance you hated any one, if in all your thoughts you were diametrically opposed and all his actions were offensive to you, you would find it not only impossible to enjoy his company, but even painful to remain in his presence. And so do we find it now, so shall we find it hereafter insupportable to live in the presence of God, in the company of just men made perfect, if we be unrenewed, unreformed.

"The mind in its own place, and of itself,
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven."

MILTON.

Surely the *whole* attention of a short and precarious life is not more than our eternal interests may require.

Men are very often *less* inquisitive to

know how far the will of God extends, that they may please him in performing it, than they are to know how far they may satisfy their lusts without destroying their souls and bodies utterly, by open violation of his law.

Such then is the end for which we live, and for the fulfilment of this purpose, God, "who loveth not the death of a sinner," has allowed us time and opportunities to improve, if we choose to make use of them. If we do not, we shall be accountable for the misapplication of our talents,—for the mispending of those years which he has given us.¹ Do you ever reflect how short the period is in which we have to work out our salvation, to become renewed in our souls? You may live twenty or thirty years longer, but you may not live a week. A fourth of the millions ushered into life do not see twelve months completed; half the human race die before the age of seventeen; and only a fourth of the living have surpassed the term of forty years. Though in the full enjoyment of vigorous youth, life

(1) Matthew, xxv. 14—30.

is ever precarious ; neither the insidious progress of disease, nor the sudden dangers of accident are postponed for old age and decrepitude. The mortal blow is struck without a distant warning,—when least expected,—when most irresistible, and how many, alas ! are hurried into eternity unprepared, unrenewed ! We are distinctly given to understand in the Scriptures, that there will be different degrees of happiness in Heaven, and we may rationally suppose that this difference will arise from the state to which our souls are brought in this life. The advanced Christian, who here walks entirely with God, whose heart is fixed on him alone, and who, though surrounded with temptation and sin is wholly devoted to his work and glory, will, we may suppose, feel more happiness hereafter, than he, who though saved, has lived more for this world ; has walked nearer the boundary line, and made little comparative progress in holiness. How important then is it, that we should not neglect the hours we now have, on the right improvement of which, may depend a vast difference in our happiness for all eternity. God gives us grace, but he leaves it wholly to

us whether we will make use of it or not. You *may* live many years, but you may be cut off in an hour; and what after all are many years for this great purpose, for this most important end? Those whose minds are set on heaping together riches, labour day and night, scarcely allowing themselves the necessities and comforts of life, and is the Christian's aim so much inferior, that days and years can be squandered in idle amusements, without making any progress towards the fulfilment of his work. But what certainty have you of many years? The present moment is ours alone; if this be unimproved, it may cost us our salvation; if this be unimproved it may lose us Heaven.

It is said by that excellent Christian, Bishop Sumner, that "to remain another day in any way of life which ought to be abandoned or changed, is to risk the soul for ever."¹ We are here to work out our salvation, the longest life is short enough if wholly devoted to this end. Are you saving your time, and turning

(1) Original Family Sermons, part V.

all your energies to this point? Are you studying God's word to find out what your duty is, to observe the character which you are to try to resemble? If you know it not, how can you obey,—if you are ignorant of it, how can you be conformed? Or are you asleep to your greatest interest, passing your time in vain amusements, and studying in novels the characters of those diametrically opposed to Christianity? If you be, you have every reason to fear and tremble.

The example of a Christian lady is worthy of notice. She was fond of, and excelled in painting; but when her mind was awakened to the great importance of time, she entirely left off practising it. Her friend, who informed the writer of the circumstance, asked her the reason, and her answer was truly excellent, "I still like it as much as ever, but the time is too short to be spent in any way, however harmless, if not calculated to render me more fit for Heaven." You are perhaps young, and think that hereafter you will prepare; then you will, though now you cannot retire from all amusements, give up your favourite

friends, and your favourite books. Religion is dry and tedious to you. I require you not to give up all pleasures. There are amusements every Christian may safely indulge in, but their end must be for the glory of God ; it is that alone which sanctifies them, and I can, fearless of contradiction, assert that religion, true and undefiled before God, never is, never can be, dry and disagreeable, and none but the Christian knows what real happiness is.

" How charming is divine philosophy !
Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns."

MILTON.

You are young, and think that death is far from you. Do the young never die ? and how would you die with a novel under your pillow, or a novel in your heart ? Thousands of fearful instances might be cited, but the following may suffice, which came under the writer's immediate knowledge, and is in the circumstances strictly true. Some years since, a clergyman, in a large and very gay

town, had two daughters. They were both of them handsome, but the younger one especially so; gay and joyous in disposition, and highly accomplished. That she was not without religion, I believe and hope, but she had never seriously considered the subject; she was young,—she was but eighteen; she was amiable and agreeable, and was, consequently, much sought after and much flattered. Had you told her that she must soon die, she would probably have laughed at you, and put off the day in which she should retire from the “poms and vanities of this wicked world” at least a year or two longer. One night she and her sister were at a large ball, she was gayer than usual, her spirits were high, and it was remarked that she was more elated than was common even to her. About three o'clock in the morning they retired to bed, and her last words to her sister were about the ball; in the morning as she arose, the first words she spoke were on the same subject, but she had not reached the other side of the room before she shrieked and fell. A blood-vessel near the heart had burst, and before her sister could reach her she was a

corpse. These circumstances, fearful as they were, made much impression at the time. The writer still clearly remembers the shock he felt when they were first related to him. Young and lovely, she died not with the words of God on her lips, not with her mind fixed on that place whither her spirit was winging its flight, but with the folly and the trifle of the ball-room in her heart. And what prevents your dying as suddenly? And how do you contemplate the idea of being hurried into eternity, with your heart fixed on novels, and your last thoughts dwelling on them?

Years are rolling away, and each return finds us, alas! how little improved, how little altered, but death at last must and will come alike to all. How truly did the poet say of the generality of mankind, that

"We take no note of time, but by its flight."

Are the awfully sudden deaths which have lately happened on our coasts, at our very doors as it were, to be no warning to us? Are these most fearful examples to be passed by as events of little moment, or of daily occur-

rence, unheeded and unimproved? After a long and tedious voyage, the harbour in sight, a new and bright existence opening to many, and expectant friends waiting for some, in the midst of the most exhilarating hopes, death overwhelmed them; in an instant were they hurried into eternity. “And think ye these were sinners above all men? I tell you nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.”¹ How few there are who live solely for the purpose of doing good; they are born,—they have so many years apparently before they die, and their sole aim is, to get these quickly or joyously passed away, but “the life of man” said Bishop Wilson, “should be only measured by its usefulness.”

In your baptism you have promised to renounce “the devil and all his works, *the pomps and vanities of this wicked world*, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh.” If these do not mean idle visiting, inordinate gaiety, love of pleasure, ambition, and such like, I confess myself unable to understand the words; and

(1) Luke, xiii. 2, 3.

yet of what consist, the stories related in novels,—are they not *entirely* on these subjects? And can you deceive yourself so far as to believe that you have *renounced* them, when in such representations you find the greatest gratification, when on characters so far removed from the standard of the Gospel, you fix you admiration, and in general, find yourself assimilated to them. Can a person rationally be said to have renounced any thing, when he not only does not dislike it, but even loves it dearly? “No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.”¹ And what effects were intended to be produced by your being baptised. The Episcopal Catechism informs us, that by this form you were “made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of Heaven,” if you keep your vows. But do you think that a child of God can find pleasure in the children of Satan? can a member of Christ’s holy body gloat

(1) Matthew, vi. 24.

with unfeigned delight on the actions of those who are diametrically opposed to his character and his laws? You must, you cannot help answering No! and the conclusion is clear, that if you love the one you hate the other; if you be the servant of God, you are at deadly enmity with the thoughts and words and actions of the servants of the Enemy of mankind. Which is your case,—your conscience alone can answer, but it is a question of most vital importance, and deserving of your immediate and earnest attention. Talking about Christ, his righteousness, merits, and atonements, while the person is not conformed to his word and spirit, is no other than solemn self-deception. It is not the man who hears and believes the sayings of Christ, whose building shall stand when the earth and its works are burned up, but he who **DOES** them.¹ “Thou art a sinner, God hath a controversy with thee; there is but a step between thee and death. Now is the accepted time. Thou art invited to return to God by Jesus Christ; come *immedi-*

(1) Matt. vii. 24—27.

ately at his call and he will save thy soul. Delay not. Eternity is at hand, and if thou diest in thy sins, where God is thou shall never come."

But if we live not *always* prepared to die, how can we expect to die prepared? Nothing can be more presumptuous, nothing more vain, than the idea that on our death beds we shall turn to God. Amidst the wreck and approaching dissolution of this body, when your every nerve is aching, and while around you are weeping and beloved friends, whom under any circumstances your heart would bleed to leave, can you expect to turn to your sins with true repentance, carefully to examine yourself and to pray sincerely. While the body is weak and ill at rest the mind must partake of the illness, and dreams and terrors flit across the imagination, till perhaps all is closed in raving delirium, or profound stupor. Of the millions that die, very few indeed have the power of recalling their thoughts in their last moments. But further than this, repentance is the *GIFT* of God, it cometh neither of man's own will, nor when he chooses; and

can you expect such a grace, at such a moment, if you have lived unrepentant amidst all the opportunities you have enjoyed.

Answer yourself this question. Are you at the present moment prepared to die? If you are, on what grounds do you hope for salvation? Not, I am sure, on your fondness for novels. Let us examine what their character in general is,—what are the examples which they hold up for our admiration, our respect, or our guidance. If you are prepared to die your mind is renewed to the image of Christ; you have, through grace, become holy; you have put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man; you love that which is good, you hate that which is evil. Are the actions represented in novels such as the gospel inculcates? Do the persons there depicted follow after righteousness? are they meek devoted lovers of Christ? No!—they are far from it; every vice is greedily pursued by them, not openly, perhaps, but under the flattering, and therefore more dangerous, guise of “fashionable or youthful indiscretions.” Selfishness is their only principle, self gratifi-

cation their only end ; love, most basely so called, their idolatry, and the pretended spring of their polluted affections. Their morality, when such is introduced, can be compared to nothing more aptly than to the Babylonian idols, stocks and stones decked out with purple, and gold, and precious gems. Inwardly they are worthless and vile, outwardly they are all glitter and shine.

Take any of the present 'fashionable' novels, analyze their character, examine their intentions and actions, and deny, if you can, that the following is an accurate description of them. "They walk after their own lusts, sensual, not having the spirit, **LOVERS OF THEMSELVES**, covetous, **BOASTERS**, proud, blasphemers, **DISOBEDIENT TO PARENTS**, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, **INCONTINENT**, **FIERCE**, despisers of those that are good, traitors, **HEADY**, **HIGHMINDED**, **LOVERS OF PLEASURE MORE THAN LOVERS OF GOD**, having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, they creep into houses, and **LEAD CAPTIVE SILLY WOMEN**," (who are) "laden with sins,

LED AWAY WITH DIVERS LUSTS;" (they are) "men of corrupt minds, mourners, complainers, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage."¹ And who are those that are thus described by the Apostles? They are those who shall come in perilous times, in the last days, who shall turn from God and despise the Redeemer who died for all, and on whom vengeance shall come in due time. And think you that you can thus read and meditate, and hug as it were to your souls such representations and not resemble them? Can you touch pitch and not be defiled? Can you make them your bosom companions, and have their examples ever before you, and yet not be more or less conformed to them? Do you think that you could thus earnestly read the Bible and not become more holy; and can you, with any reason, expect evil works not to increase the natural wickedness of your heart? It is easier by far going out of the way when we are in, than into the way when we are out.

(1) 2 Pet. iii. 3. Jude, 18, 19. 2 Tim. iii. 2-5.

"Facilis est descensus Averni."

"However disguised the inflammatory tale,
And covered with a fine spun precious veil,
Such writers and such readers owe the gust
And relish of their pleasures, all to lust."

COWPER.

Be not deceived. Evil communications corrupt good manners. "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."¹ In vain do men seek for methods to reconcile God and Mammon. There is no medium between loving the Lord and being his enemy, between belonging to Christ or to Satan. There are too many, it is to be feared, in this world, who are really against Christ, and 'scatter abroad,' who flatter themselves that they are workers together with him and of the number of his friends. And what says the Apostle your conduct is to be towards persons of the above character? "FROM SUCH TURN AWAY;" and do you conscientiously obey this mandate, when you not only follow them, but make them your intimate friends?

(1) Matt. xii. 30.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is pure and holy,—it requires holiness of *heart* and life. “A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things ; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things ; but I say unto you, that *every idle word* that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment ; for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”¹

As I said before, it is not only necessary that our talents and opportunities be not perverted, but they must be actually improved. We are sent into this world to *work* out our salvation ; on the one hand stands Heaven, on the other eternal punishment. The duty of a Christian is not founded on a listless or inactive state ; it is a continued exertion and labour ; the cross must be taken up *daily*. God has endowed us with talents which he has ordered us to make use of ; if they be improved we but fulfil our duty, if they be neglected we sin, and shall be most justly punished hereafter, unless we

(1) Matt. xii. 35—37.

repent. Speaking as we now are, these talents may be said all to lie in the mind. All have not equal opportunities for improvement, perhaps all have not equal powers, but such as are possessed are to be used. "To whom much is given from him much shall be required." As from the mind proceed our thoughts, and thence our actions, so are we imperiously called upon to improve our minds as far as we possibly can. If we be in fault in judgment, it may be owing to our natural incapacity, and therefore we shall be guiltless, but if, as is far too often the case, it arises from laziness, or inattention, or pride, do you think that we shall be clear before God, who searches the heart and knows whether we try to serve him or not. He will accept our most imperfect deeds, if done to the best of our abilities for his glory, but he will not accept our best deeds if done with carelessness, or in negligence of him.

It is not the intention, nor does it enter into the scheme of the Gospel, to lay down rules for the guidance of man in every little particular ; it gives us great principles, but leaves it to our

reasons and our consciences to judge, how our conduct agrees with them. It gives us the great direction "to redeem the time for the days are evil," but tells us not how this is to be done in each particular case; it orders us, as we care for our future happiness, to improve our talents, but it leaves us to our own selves to judge, what does and what does not, improve them. To redeem the time, we all know, means not to waste it, but time is wasted when not usefully employed, and no human creature can be usefully employed, who is neglecting to prepare for death, or is heaping up to himself the greater damnation. The question then becomes important, in what manner do fictitious works affect the mind? do they make it better able to judge, to act, or to promote our good in general? We think decidedly not,—as the perusal of the following, collected from some of the best and most valued works on the mind, will convince you. The evil effects of them the writer knows but too well by sad experience; but lest he might be led away by too deep feeling, he has taken care to say nothing under this head but what he is fully borne out in by

those who have the best means of knowing, and cannot even be suspected of being prejudiced.

No one will deny that the human mind is capable of being improved, regulated, and strengthened, if proper exertions be used ; or on the contrary, of being weakened, perverted, or debased, if it be neglected. There is in reality, much less difference than is generally supposed, in the natural talents of men. What difference does exist arises chiefly from the different education and moral culture which the thinking power within us has undergone.

In what consist the peculiarities of the savage and the civilized man ? The former may possess knowledge, he may have in his own way as much information as the latter, but his mind has not the same power of making use of it. Uneducated as the civilized man may be, he yet has the advantage of a more accurate judgment, more facility in comparing, and more mental activity. And as is the difference between these two and

from the same cause, arises the dissimilarity between the polished and acute Savant of London or Paris, and the ordinary peasant of the southern countries of Europe. The one has stored his mind with information, has regulated it with care and attention, and always keeps it employed and bright; the mental faculties of the other are but one mass of polluted ignorance, he has no power over them, he lets them wander where and on what vice they will, and, as is admirably described by the poet, his life is passed as one dark and blank chaos, and he does right only when it is easier than doing wrong.

"He wandered on unknowing what he sought,
And whistled as he went for want of thought."

The real end of education is, so to form the mind that it may be capable of seizing on, analyzing, and judging of facts when presented to it, and not, as is too often erroneously supposed, only to store it with a mass of information, which, without this other power, must of necessity be crude, undigested, and useless. If our mental powers be healthful they are always kept in this state, and every

one, if not past a certain age, has the ability in himself of bringing them more or less to it. Sir Isaac Newton, on being asked to account for his great talents said, that as far as he could judge, they entirely arose from the habit he acquired when very young, of intensely fixing his mind on whatever he was engaged in. It is only when we have brought our minds to this active and intelligent state, that we can say that they are either fully formed or completely improved. The importance and duty of doing this is, however, very obvious; not to mention the great worldly advantages which thence accrue, without this power over ourselves, we are never safe in forming an opinion. As we are constituted in this world, our conclusions, to be sound, have generally to be drawn from great masses of facts, frequently contradictory, often uncertain, and to be compared one with the other. But in all opinions there must be a right and a wrong, and thence arise the men whose characters we call sound and unsound. The one has learned to judge accurately, the other has the unfortunate faculty of generally stumbling the contrary way. A man

of really sound understanding values every pursuit or object in its proper measure, and follows it the more strenuously according to its actual importance. The unsound character does the reverse ; he misunderstands the comparative importance of objects, and is led away to the earnest prosecution of such things as are really of no value. If we take one course it will hurry us into misery, and perhaps ruin all around us, if we follow the other, it will strew our path with flowers, and bring down blessings on all with whom we are connected.

If the mind be so educated, or so regulated, that it has attained the power of judging correctly, as far as human reason can go, so far it is very good for us ; but if through laziness, prejudice, or neglect, we have allowed it to be overgrown with weeds, or to become like a stagnant and muddy pool, we may probably be—and we see those around daily who are, the curse and ruin of themselves and all that fall in their way. A well regulated mind is the greatest temporal blessing, man, under God's grace, is able to confer on himself.

We are undoubtedly accountable for our opinions and for our conduct, if we have not taken all the means in our power to discover whether they be right or wrong. If we choose habitually to exercise it, we are endowed with the faculty of reasoning in order that we may thus distinguish. But as we can only reason soundly or draw just conclusions from an accumulation of facts calmly and accurately considered, so it is our bounden duty to collect and examine into these facts, and to keep the mind *always* in a fit state so to do.¹ The

(1) To those who are decidedly Christians, an hint may, perhaps, be neither altogether useless nor unacceptable. In the intercourse with the world, there are many situations in which harm may be avoided if the mind be made up on the course of action to be followed. If it be not, the *uncertainty* may cause us to set a bad example, to do some action which may lower the standard of religion in the eyes of the worldly, or perhaps to offend a weaker brother. Every one must have been placed in situations to which this must apply. It is therefore of great importance to the consistency of our character, that we clearly investigate all the different tendencies of actions, whether we may ever be led into them or not, and to have the principles lucidly laid out in our minds. In the words of the Apostle, "*Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.*"

law does not acquit the murderer because he was drunken ; he had *intentionally* brought his mind into a state in which he could not distinguish between right and wrong, but do you think that that was any excuse for his crime ? If by any means we bring ourselves into such a state that all morality shall appear perverted, that all our actions are seen through a false and distorted medium, and we commit such things as be sinful, however great may be our sincerity or our belief in the propriety at the moment, do you think that we shall be sinless before God ? No,—there is a double sin, the perverting of the mind, and the crime thence springing from it. These errors will not, cannot be judged by an earthly tribunal, but be sure that at the bar of Christ they will be considered as of as deep a shade as any. The Infidel or Deist is most decidedly accountable for having such a belief as he has, as it can only have arisen from a sin-stained and perverted understanding. If the killing of the body be a crime both in the eyes of the Creator and of man, what must be the wilful destruction of your own soul or that of others.

“ The law that bids the murderer die
Is far too just to pass the trifle by.”

If a man be vicious, he is disposed to reject evident truths, and to embrace ridiculous opinions. That vice weakens the understanding, infatuates the judgment, and hinders it from discovering between truth and falsehood, especially in matters of morality and religion, is a truth not more constantly affirmed in Scripture, than confirmed by reason and experience. But if a man be in such a state, can you for a moment fancy that all the sincerity he possesses can make his actions or his aims right. It is one of the curses of error that the man who is the subject of it, if he has had the opportunity of being better informed, cannot possibly do right so far as he is under it. He has brought himself into an utter incapacity of acting virtuously: since it is vicious to obey an ill-informed conscience, if that conscience might have been better informed; and certainly vicious to disobey conscience, whether it be well or ill-informed.

Ignorance is the impure fountain whence nine-tenths of the crime to be found in

the world are really derived, for the judgment of such as are ignorant of principles, especially those of the Gospel, can be dictated only by prejudice. That the reading of novels has a tendency to pervert the judgment, and to blunten or destroy the moral feelings, we have no hesitation in asserting. The constant perusal of such works is almost certain to weaken the powers of the mind ; to make it imbecile, vain and frivolous. Our mental faculties require exercise and activity as much, if not more, than our bodies. The oftener they are exerted and stretched, the greater their powers become, and the quicker is their action. By carrying a calf daily, Milo was at last able to carry the bull. But reading novels has the very contrary effect. It entirely enervates and unnerves the mind, as its powers are not even slightly exerted. The eye passes over the page, but the mind is almost unemployed.

Another bad effect of reading novels is their accustoming us to vice. A poet has sung, that vice which is at first beheld as an odious monster, is, when seen too oft,

endured, then pitied, then embraced; and he has only added his evidence to a fact which has been received upon the testimony of the moralist and the philosopher in every age, and is acted upon as a fixed and uniform principle of our nature by all classes of men. There is a peculiarity connected with such reading, that, above all others, the characters there delineated fix themselves on the fancy,—become part of ourselves, and exert a vast influence, however unaware we may be of it, in our daily conduct. Another moral effect is, that such reading casts a false light over all the circumstances of life, and over all the feelings of the heart. As after gazing steadily at the sun for a few minutes, all the objects around look black and dismal, so are our imaginations perverted, and the real transactions of the world, the finer feelings given us for happiness blasted and discoloured. We insensibly creep into the habit of considering every circumstance as unpropitious, and because our friends do not show their affection in the same manner as we see the characters in the novels doing, we begin to suspect, then to fear, and at last to hate. Every thing becomes

crooked in our eyes, and like the jaundiced man, we can see nothing as it really exists. Again, novel reading has the effect of vitiating or destroying the power of attention, or in other words, of injuring the memory. On this faculty depends all our improvement, and, in a great measure, our usefulness; for the exercise of it, entire attention to the subject before us is requisite, and a forcible effort of the mind, as it were, to imprint it. But attention is much, if not altogether, influenced by habit, and such reading entirely destroys this. The mind attends only so long as the words are before the eye, or as far as the connection of the story requires, and the faculty is lost of either reading serious works with attention or of remembering them. Again, it disables us from any sort of real study; the mind, after being exerted, may with ease and without harm be lowered.

"Neque semper arcum tendit Apollo."

But when it is habitually kept at the lowest point, it is impossible to raise it up

again. Again, such reading tends to implant vanity, and gives us an inaccurate and exaggerated idea of our own mental capacities. The first step to knowledge is to know that we are ignorant. If we be convinced of this, we cannot but press on in search of further information, but while we remain self-contented, or self-conceited with our proficiency, an impassable barrier is thrown across our path. As we are all more or less subject to self-contentment some writers have advised the frequent reflecting on the number of the sciences, or on the quantity of information and books, and the little we know of any of them, that by this means we may be humbled and stirred up to further exertions. It is remarkable that those who have made the greatest progress in knowledge and wisdom, are the very persons who have complained most bitterly of their ignorance. Nothing will so surely conduce to a person's progress in either sacred or worldly knowledge, as a deep feeling of his want, nothing so surely retard him as the contrary.

"Like the bat of Indian brakes,
Her pinions fan the wound she makes,
And soothing thus the dreamer's pain,
She drinks the life-blood from the vein."¹

Such is a very short glance at a very few of the greater evils arising from such reading,—the branches are far-spreading and luxuriant. And I ask you again, can there be a greater crime than thus perverting the soul and faculties which God has given you?²

(1) To those who are really desirous of improving their minds, the writer warmly recommends the perusal of Dr. Abercrombie's "*Inquiries concerning the Intellectual Powers*," a work of great interest and utility, and easy to be comprehended. There are two editions published in this country, one in Harper's Family Library, an exact reprint from the English copies, price fifty cents; the other with notes and explanations by Jacob Abbott, intended for the use of schools, price seventy-five cents. Of the two, the latter will be found the best and most easily understood. To this will naturally follow Archbishop Whately's "*Elements of Logic*," a book better able to assist in the investigation of truth, and to improve the reasoning faculties than perhaps any other extant. Though its name may startle, it will be found to be easily understood by persons of either sex, and very interesting and instructive. An edition has been published by Jackson of New York, price one dollar.

(2) Another evil effect which we are justified in suppos-

The only two excuses worthy of notice which we have ever heard offered, are,

I. That whatever the working of the plot may be, the moral is, in general, good; and that the Bible contains immoral descriptions, but no one ever yet was perverted by them. Allowing for a moment the goodness of the moral, (which, however, we can by no means subscribe to,) it is to be remarked, that a work may contain immoral

ing that novels produce is the predisposing to insanity, a disease understood to be fearfully on the increase in the Northern States of this country. "Erroneous education is reckoned by many writers, among the predisposing causes. * * * By too great indulgence, and a want of moral discipline, the passions acquire greater power, and a character is formed, subject to caprice and *to violent emotions*; a predisposition to insanity is thus laid in the temper and moral affections of the individual. The exciting causes to madness have greater influence on persons of such habits, than on those whose feelings are regulated." *North American Review*, No. XCIV. pp. 119, 120. In France, the greater proportion of the mad is said to be from the classes of the musicians, artists and poets, while loss of intellect is very rare indeed among metaphysicians, mathematicians, and such as are employed in hard and sound thinking.

descriptions, and yet have a good effect on the mind, by showing clearly the evil consequences which thence are CERTAIN to arise, and the natural sinfulness of man in particular. But with respect to novels the case is altered. The reader wades through a mass of glittering sin decked out in the brightest colours, and only sees the punishment at last in an inferior light. Besides, who believes novels ; and in order that good may effect our conduct we must implicitly believe that such and such an evil will come upon us. The depravity, besides accustoming you to look calmly at sin, seizes on the imagination, and entirely shrouds the good which may be supposed to lie under it ; and as far as he can remember, the writer never yet met with any one who could assert that he had received actual *good* from such reading ; but should he still fancy that he is none the worse, how will he answer for the waste of time, as no profit has been derived ?

II. The other excuse is, that it teaches us *life*, and shows us what human nature is. What a fearful mistake ! How debasing to

poor humanity ! Ask the man who knows the world if such be the case, and his answer must be, No. A novel has happily been defined to be "A distorted view of the vices and follies of mankind," and do you think that any thing can be learned from this ? No ! if information be your object, search your own heart,—in yourself lies a world, and from it you can best learn the springs of action of all mankind. As to the truth of the conversation and the manners, that is entirely ridiculous. The authors seldom, if ever, have even spoken to a duke or a nobleman, far less been admitted into their society ; and were we to see the characters personified, and hear half the conversation repeated, we should scarcely admit the "gentlemen and ladies" into our kitchens.

"Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance, but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away that which he hath."¹ This is a fearful warning to all, if we neglect the

(1) Matt. xiii. 12.

improvement of the talents which *we have*, and its fulfilment is but too clearly seen in such as give themselves up to novel reading. There are many around us who have but weak understandings and little education, yet who apply themselves, to the best of their abilities, to their duties and business, and they pass through life calmly and respectably. They are seldom thrown into difficult situations, and their knowledge, such as it is, and their common sense is sufficient to direct them in that sphere of life into which it has pleased God to call them. But if they become novel readers, how great, how instantaneous is the change. The machinery of the mind is disordered, and they render themselves unfit for any situation.

" Nil habuit Codrus: quis enim negat? et tamen illud Perdidit infelix totum nil."

Those who devote not the power and light which God has given them, to the purposes for which he has granted these gifts; from them shall be taken away the unemployed and prostituted blessings. The effects of true religion are exactly contrary to the

above; they raise the lowest character, and give a brightness and polish to the dullest intellect. True religion elevates the understanding and purifies the heart; strengthens the weakness of our nature, and instead of being either dull or wearisome, or inculcating a system of self-tormenting, heightens all our enjoyment, and is itself the source of the highest enjoyment to which we can attain in this imperfect state, while it prepares us for our progress into eternity.

But, perhaps, some may still feel inclined to object, that without such reading, time cannot be passed. What! was time given us only to be dissipated? Are there not the destitute to support, the aged to comfort and assist,—are there none to instruct who are still ignorant of the way of salvation? Have you yourself no talents to improve, no sins to get rid of? Be sure of this, that if you take a proper view of your duty towards God, towards man, and towards yourself, you will find the twenty-four hours but far too short. Suppose yourself now on your death bed,

and decide which line of conduct appears the most desirable. That in which you have striven to 'kill time,' or that in every moment of which you have been fulfilling your duty.¹

"Pleasure admitted to undue degree,
Enslaves the will, nor leaves the judgment free.
The heart surrendered to the ruling power
Of some ungoverned passion every hour,
Finds by degrees the truths that once bore sway,
And all their deep impressions wear away.
The breach, though small at first, soon opening wide
In rushes folly with a full moon tide;
Then welcome error of whatever size,
To justify it by a thousand lies."

COWPER.

Now, supposing that all I have said has failed to convince you of the impropriety of novel reading, do you reflect that we are all accountable for the effects that our example may have on others? "Who-soever shall break one of these least commandments, *and shall teach men so*, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven."² Under *very* peculiar circum-

(1) James, i. 27.

(2) Matthew, v. 19.

stances it *might* happen that by the perusal of such works, you would neither injure yourself, nor waste your time; yet your doing so might have a bad tendency on those over whom you have influence: your children, your clerks, or your domestics; and if the effects be deleterious to those who have had the advantages of education, how infinitely more so to those who have not, and are without the power of discriminating, and full of high and excitable passions. Several instances of dishonesty and depravity among female domestics have come to the knowledge of the writer, which can *clearly* be traced to the effects which novels have had on their minds. Like the small and silent stream, they gradually undermine, till the whole superstructure of morality and principle falls with an overpowering and desolating crash.

What can be a more distressing, a more melancholy sight, than that of a mother, to whom God has given children, and duties most high and responsible, wasting her time over a novel. Yet such is the case, and

with sorrow we say it, in a Christian country such is not uncommon! If excuse there be for such conduct, it surely applies only to the young, the giddy, or the uninformed, but when those who are blessed with education, whose years are mature, who have influence, and are called to a situation the most honourable, the most arduous, if properly fulfilled, thus transgress, who can look on and not tremble!

Are you a Mother? Reflect on the responsibilities attached to that character. God has given you children; but he has given them solely that they may be brought up in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord,"—that they may be useful and honourable members of society. To endeavour to make them such, is more particularly your duty. At your hand will God require them, should you have neglected them. You of course love them, you would be willing to do or sacrifice any thing were it for their good. To them you look for comfort in your old age; you wish them to be learned, accomplished, and polite; perhaps you desire that they may

be rich, but do you try to make them religious? You wish them to be praised of men; do you so educate them that they may grow in grace and favour with God?¹ Be assured of this, that if they be not Christians, neither learning or talents, nor wealth can make them happy either here or hereafter, nor can you hope for peace or comfort from them. "Seek ye first," and take care that they seek first, "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you"² and them.

The future conduct of a child depends much upon its mother. It is the first principles which are instilled into its tender mind, which give the tendency for good or bad to its future life. If a child be not educated in the fear of God, or taught the way that is right, where or when is it to learn its duty? When it first goes into the world?—You well know that then it will not. When it be grown up?—It is then that evil passions are the strongest, and early prejudices the most

(1) Jer. ix. 23, 24.

(2) Matt. vi. 33.

firmly fixed. When it is old?—And how know you that it ever will be old? Under the ordinary course of providence, then, the child's temporal and eternal welfare depends solely on you, and upon your first instructions. What it sees you now doing, it will hereafter practise,—what you now teach it, whether for good or ill, it will never forget. At your hands will its soul be required hereafter at the judgment seat of God, and you will have either to account for the eternal ruin of your own offspring, or rejoice for evermore with it in eternal happiness. By the grace of God, a child ill educated may become religious; the cases are not very uncommon, but I am sure that you would tremble at leaving a thing of such importance to mere chance.

And can you allow them to read and pore over works, such as novels in general are, and suppose that they will so conduct themselves as you would desire them to do? We are all but too willing to follow evil rather than good, but children particularly so. If by evil example, or conversation, or reading, their minds are once perverted, the

chances are very much against their ever again becoming pure and right. It is in childhood that the mind must be strengthened, formed, and taught to think; it is at that age that it must be regulated, and it is then that it can be most easily turned one way or another; it is then that example has the greatest power, precept the greatest force. But surely the morals of novels are not such as you would wish your child to have, nor are the characters such as you wish it to follow. And what other consequences can you with reason expect if you allow them to read them?

It is while a person is young that he must be taught self-denial, and how to resist temptations. And certainly a young man, in the bustle and excitement, and competition of business, and amidst the allurements of vice, is surrounded with dangers enough, without the seducing assistance and Circean influence of works of fiction.

Let it not be forgotten that on the education of the rising generation depends the welfare

and safety of this country.¹ Let a few short years be past, and those who are now children will be the leading and influential members of society. The old Republicans are quickly disappearing; old principles are losing their support, and the question must now be, whether in their stead are to spring up a novel reading, and therefore an illiterate population, and whether laws dictated by distorted and fiction-born views of good are to be the rules of government or not. On the progress of sound education and intelligence the welfare of this country is based; any thing opposing this opposes

(1) When the Beggar's Opera was first brought on to the stage in London, such was its effect, that many respectable young men, animated by the glowing colours in which the robber's life is painted, actually took to the roads as highwaymen. The government was, in consequence, obliged to prohibit its being acted any longer. This is a strong instance of the evil effects that the representation of vice, when pleasingly drawn, may have on the young, and although it be not always so conspicuous, we have no reason for doubting that it is equally efficacious in other cases. The same effects are said to have been produced in Germany by 'The Robbers' of Schiller.

the dearest interests of all Americans.¹ But if the reading of novels be injurious to boys, how much more is it so to girls? The former, by their intercourse with the world may, probably, have their minds hardened, and by seeing real characters and scenes, have the more gross of the erroneous impressions corrected; but the latter, being naturally of a more contemplative disposition, with softer and more excitable feelings, are apt to be entirely led away by such representations without being able to correct the false ideas; what they read, insensibly becomes a part of themselves, and should they be without religious and counteracting impressions, the suggestions of these books are the main springs of all their actions; they realize the characters as their own; their heads are filled with high-flown and ridiculous notions of love and elopements, of fashion, dress, and vanity, and as these strengthen and increase, the duty of love and obedience to parents is on the wane, (how should it be otherwise when they

(1) "The great bulwark of a republican government is the cultivation of education."—DE WITT CLINTON.

see them so often ridiculed and held up to contempt?) All care for the employments or decorums of life, or for the improvement of their minds ceases; and that most nameless and enchanting grace of retiring modesty, which tends so much to give a virtuous woman the power and influence she possesses, is blasted and sickened over by the Simoon of evil characters and pernicious example. To this succeeds a restless unhappiness,—an unhappiness but too often increased by an actual, if not acknowledged, infidelity and faithlessness in God's promises. No one who is not fulfilling her duties can be happy, and no novel reader can conscientiously fulfil her duties.

In the course of nature, these young ladies are to become wives and mothers. On them is to depend the happiness of the husband; on their conversation and advice, often his honour and prosperity; and on their piety, good sense, and sound knowledge, the eternal well-being of the children.

The institution of marriage was ordained

by God for the increase of happiness, but, alas ! how often do we see it perverted and rendered the curse and ruin of both parties. And what else can be expected if the lady has her mind polluted and her understanding perverted by such reading ; how can she converse with her partner as a reasonable and thinking being, assist him in his cares and sorrows, and rejoice with him in his joys ?

Without some pursuit, life becomes insupportable, and to a woman, the only paths which are open, are either to regulate her household, improve her mind, and prepare herself for Heaven ; or to give herself up to amusements, and rush, more or less deep into dissipation. Or if this be not done, life becomes one blank and misty chaos, with much to weary and distress, and little to hope for. A worldly man is very much to be pitied, but what words can express the unhappy state of that lady, living in 'good society' and easy circumstances, whose mind is entirely fixed on selfish trifles.

But there is another light in which we

may look at this. On the female sex greatly depends the virtue and social advancement of the other portion of mankind. It is their influence which gives the tone to society and to manners, and forces onwards the march of intellect. If properly used, their power is great, and cannot but be advantageous; but if they be silly, or vicious, or uneducated, their example and influence must be most deleterious to all around them. The extremes of this may be seen in England, on the one hand, and in Spain and Italy, on the other; but as their power falls, so do their personal comforts and respect decrease, till, as in some parts of the southern countries of Europe, all is closed in their own degradation and calamity.

Admiral Lord Collingwood, whose knowledge of the world and excellent good sense will surely not be denied, never allowed his daughters to read a novel, yet, at the same time, they grew up remarkable for their knowledge, virtue and piety.

As I have said much to you on what you

ought not, allow me to say a few words to you on what you ought to read. As knowledge is one of the noblest improvements of the mind, and of the greatest advantage to a life of piety and virtue, the Gospel frequently urges it upon us, as our duty, to endeavour to get our minds furnished with divine and useful knowledge; and the knowledge thus required is not merely of the speculative and notional kind, (though such, in its way, is very useful,) but such a knowledge of those things which are of the highest importance to our happiness, as may help us to make a progress in all holiness and goodness. We must endeavour to grow in wisdom and spiritual understanding, so as to discern the things which are excellent, and to prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

As our object in being here is, that we may be made more fit for Heaven, we should make every effort to fulfil this end, and this is only to be effected by strenuously applying ourselves to the study of God's word, and by prayer. By the first, we learn what we ought to do,

by the latter, we acquire grace and strength to carry out our resolutions.

The glories of Heaven, which are reserved for those that love the Lord, and the everlasting miseries, which will be the terrible portion of all impenitent workers of iniquity, are disclosed in the Scriptures. Again, these alone set forth the true reason of our being in this world, viz, not for enjoyment, but for trial,—not to gain temporal pleasures and blessings, but that our souls may be disciplined and prepared for immortal honour and glory. And they show the right way which all must walk, they hold out rewards, and they threaten most awful punishments.

As the Scriptures are not merely the best guidance we can consult, but the only one which can make us wise unto salvation, it becomes the indispensable duty of all, *carefully and constantly* to peruse these sacred oracles, that through them we may become “perfect, thoroughly furnished to

every good work."¹ This, indeed, is not only agreeable to the Divine command, and the design of the Scriptures,² but is further commended to us by the practice of the best Christians, both in ancient and modern times, and by the gracious promise made by Him who cannot lie, to all believers, "That they shall **ALL** be taught the word of God."³ What time is to be devoted to this purpose, must ever depend on the circumstances of the individual. It is obvious that some time ought **DAILY** to be devoted to this most important study, and that it should be undertaken with devout simplicity and humility, prosecuted with diligence and attention, *accompanied by prayer for the divine aid and teaching*, together with a sincere desire to know and perform the will of God, and laying aside all prejudices, follow wherever conviction may lead our minds. For it is undeniable, that persons of piety, who are anxiously desirous of the knowledge of the Divine truth, are aided by the spirit of God in searching out

(1) 2 Tim. iii. 17.

(2) John, v. 39. 1 Tim. ii. 4.

(3) John, vi. 45.

the meaning of Scripture, especially in such subjects as have an especial reference to faith and religious practice.

The Bible is the sacred store house of heavenly wisdom ; its pages are stamped with the divine seal of eternal truth, and contains the charter of our hopes, our privileges, and our joys. In order to read the Bible with real profit, we must begin by denying ourselves every step of the way ; for every step of the way it will be found to oppose our corrupt nature. Another thing necessary, is to pay it great homage ; so that when we come to any part which we cannot connect with other passages, we must conclude that this arises from our ignorance, but that the seeming contradictions are in themselves quite reconcilable.

Whatever tends to lead us from the love and study of the Holy Scriptures, should be dreaded as opposed to the highest interest of mankind. Yet we feel sure, that after you have been engaged for some time in reading a novel, you can neither study nor steadily meditate

on its sacred page. The glare and the glitter, and the intoxicating excitement of the one, entirely incapacitate you from regarding, as you ought, the importance and the wisdom of the other. After having had your mind employed on fictitious writings, can you kneel down and pray with faith, in Spirit and in truth? Are not the wings of your soul clipped? Are not the aspirations of the spirit clogged and overwhelmed by the troubled waters of a weakened and discomfited mind? Yet we are directed to "pray without ceasing,"¹ and never to let our minds fall into such a state that we cannot raise them up to the throne of God. The wilful continuance in any state of life which prevents our doing this is, the Gospel tells us, decidedly a sin.

Would you judge of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of any pleasure, take this rule:—whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, or takes off the relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever

(1) Thes. v. 17.

increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you whatever it may be in itself. If, when summoned to give an account of our stewardship, we shall be called upon to answer for the use which we have made of our bodily organs, and of our means of relieving the wants of our fellow-creatures, how much more shall we be accountable for the exercise of the nobler faculties of our nature—of invention, memory, and judgment, and for our employment of every instrument and opportunity of diligent application, serious reflection, and honest decision.

And to what subject might we in all reason be expected to apply to more earnestly, than to that wherein our own eternal interests are at issue. When God of his goodness has vouchsafed to grant us such abundant means of instruction, in that which we are most concerned to know, how great must be the guilt, and how awful the punishment of *voluntary* ignorance! Without labour and industry we can never learn to draw

or sing, without these we never acquire a knowledge of history, or of any of the sciences, yet we expect to be Christians without attention, study, or inquiry. And this is the more unreasonable if we reflect that Christianity is the *revealed* will of God, and cannot be learnt by human observation, or thought alone, as other things may. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." "Search the Scriptures." "Be ready to give every one a reason for the hope that is in you." Forget not, that should you neglect the means of grace God has given you; he may see fit to take them from you or you from them, or so darken your mind that they will be but stumbling blocks in your path. AT ONCE make use of them, for should He, in his great mercy, see fit to continue them still to you, your neglect will only aggravate your crime, and at last bring down on you the heavier punishment.

The time of reckoning must at length arrive, and when finally summoned to the bar of God, what plea can you have to urge in your defence, if you remain *willingly and obstinately* ignorant of the way which leads to life, with

such transcendent means of knowing it, and such urgent motives to pursuit.

In conclusion : the safety of all states depends upon religion ; it ministers to social order, confers stability upon government and laws, and gives security to property. " Religion, unfeignedly loved, perfecteth men's abilities unto all kinds of virtuous services in the commonwealth," while infidelity, immorality and sedition, usually go hand in hand. Scepticism is the natural effect of a great and continuous reading of novels ; it subverts the whole foundation of morals ; it not only tends to corrupt the moral taste, but also promotes the growth of vanity, ferocity, and licentiousness. Hence, presumptuous, and impatient of subordination, these ' scoffers' and ' mockers' wish to follow the impulse of their own lusts and deep-rooted passions, and consequently, hate the salutary and moral restraints imposed by the Gospel.

The religion of Christ is a code of laws, as well as a system of doctrines, a rule of practice as well as of faith. It

has certain conditions inseparably connected with the belief of it, to which there is, but too often, a great unwillingness to submit. Belief, to be reasonable and consistent, must include obedience, and hence arises the main objections to it.

Cherishing unchristian dispositions and passions in their bosoms, and very frequently also devoted to unchristian practices, which they will not consent to abandon, men pretend to decide upon the evidences of religion, from which they have little to hope and much to fear if it be true. Therefore they labour to prove the Gospel is not true, that they may rid themselves of its injunctions. And as ridiculing religion is the most likely way to depreciate its truth in the sight of the unreflecting multitude, scoffers, having no solid argument to produce against it, burlesque some parts of it, and falsely charge the other with being contradictory. They introduce, (what they call religious) characters into their works, put Scripture language into their mouths, a sanctified face on their shoulders, and every evil deed is laid to their charge.

They then affect to laugh at them, and get superficial thinkers to laugh with them.

We have before us the History of France from the first revolution until now, and we see recorded in fiery characters, the avowed contempt of religion, morbid insensibility to morals, desecrated sabbaths, and abandonment to amusements the most frivolous and dissipating, which still prevail in that country as well as on other parts of the continent. And we see the same moral revolution, the same mental degradation stalking through our own land, with a towering head and an outstretched arm; changing the good to evil, the beautiful to ruin and desecration; and we see the plant springing up, from every element gaining strength, the seed of which must shortly ripen and cast abroad throughout our fair and lovely country its pernicious and awful effects.

As in France, as in Germany, as in England, the press perverted from its high and noble object, has become the instrument by which all this evil is disseminated, and the fearful catastrophies which

have marked France as a land of blood and terror, by it have been produced ; and at this moment it is threatening our homes and our constitution, our religion and our liberties.¹ As the grass before the summer sun, the moral culture of our youth of both sexes is withering and overpowered. Novels have gone forth throughout the whole land like a poisonous vapour, blasting the fair foliage and the ripening fruit, and in their stead are thickly springing up the rank weeds of avarice, infidelity and vice. Like as when the angel of death was hovering over the host of the Assyrians, all feelings of religion and morality are dying away before their soporific and

(1) "The principles of the arch-infidel (Voltaire) were most rapid in their operation. He who aimed at no such evil as that which he contributed so greatly to bring about, was himself startled at their progress ; in his latter days, he trembled at the consequences which he then foresaw, and indeed, his remains had scarcely mouldered in the grave, before *these consequences* brought down the whole fabric of government in France, overturned her altars, subverted her throne, *carried guilt, devastation, and misery into every part of his own country*, and shook the rest of Europe like an earthquake."

SOUTHEY'S LIFE OF WESLEY.

destructive influence, and leaving our moral world one field of fearful corruption and putrefaction.

To recapitulate the argument,—

I. The end of our living is that we may work out our salvation.

II. God has given us time and opportunities so to do, if we choose to make use of them.

III. But to him we shall be accountable for such opportunities, and either rewarded or punished as we do not, or do neglect them.

IV. Our duty, therefore, is to redeem the time, which is, 1. But too short at the longest; and, 2. May not continue another day to any of us.

V. We are also accountable for the improvement of all our talents, which can only be effected by the improvement of our mind.

VI. Do novels tend to improve it? No.
1. They weaken it. 2. Unfit it for beneficial in-

tercourse with our fellow-creatures. 3. Lead our thoughts from the great end of our being ; and, 4. Are most likely to promote vicious thoughts and profligate conduct, and are therefore in direct opposition to our duty.

VII. The idea that any good or information can be obtained from them is (with a very few exceptions) wholly without foundation.

VIII. The principles of novels in general are diametrically opposed to the principles of the Scriptures.

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